

THE MAGISTRATES

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BY

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[Translated by Epiphanius Wilson, A.M.]

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN, a young lady of eighteen, sister of the late Hadji-Ghafour.

AZIZ-BEY, the lover and *fiancé* of Sekiné-Khanoun.

ZOBEIDE, paternal aunt of Sekiné-Khanoun.

ZEINEB-KHANOUN, mistress of the late Hadji-Ghafour.

AGA-ABBAS, brother of Zeineb.

AGA-SELMAN, son of the sieve-maker, advocate of Sekiné-Khanoun.

AGA-MERDAN, son of the confectioner, advocate of Zeineb.

AGA-HASSAM, a merchant.

AGA-KERIM, chief of the courtiers.

GOUL-SEBAH, servant of Sekiné-Khanoun.

THE PRESIDENT OF THE TRIBUNAL.

AGA-REHIM,	}	Assessors of the Tribunal.
AGA-DJEBBAR,		
AGA-BECHIN,		
AGA-SETTAR,		

THE INSPECTOR OF THE MARKET.

HEPOU,	}	witnesses for Zeineb.
CHEIDA,		
QOURBAN ALI,		
HANIFE,		

BEDEL,	}	soldiers, witnesses for Sekiné-Khanoun.
QUHREMAN,		
GHAFFER,		
NEZER,		

THE CHIEF OF THE BAILIFFS.

ECED, domestic to the President of the Tribunal.

NASSER, a lackey.

A seven months' old infant.

THE MAGISTRATES

ACT FIRST

Scene I—The Scene is laid in the House of the Late Merchant, Hadji-Ghafour

Sekiné-Khanoun, sister of Hadji-Ghafour, is discovered standing before the window; she calls to her servant, Goul-Sebah.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Goul-Sebah! Goul-Sebah!

GOUL-SEBAH [*entering the room*]. Here I am, madame. What do you wish?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Have you not heard of the trouble which my shameless sister-in-law is bringing upon me, Goul-Sebah?

GOUL-SEBAH. No, madame. How could I hear about it?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. She has given notice to the President of the Tribunal that she objects to his paying over to me the money which my brother had placed in his hands for me. She claims that this sum should revert to her. Good heavens! Goul-Sebah, was ever such a case heard of? I do not know what sin I have committed against God, but things always fall out unluckily for me.

GOUL-SEBAH. Whatever put such ideas in your head, madame? Why should things fall out unluckily for you?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. As you are aware, Goul-Sebah, I am desperately in love with Aziz-Bey. For two whole years did the unhappy youth in vain beseech my brother to give him my hand; my brother would not consent, because Aziz-Bey is the son of a heretic, and an officer of government. But now that my brother is dead, and I am free to dispose of my hand as I choose, I wish to enter into possession of

the money which he has left me, to provide for my wants in peace, and to fulfil the vow of my heart. And lo and behold, this shameless sister-in-law has protested against the payment of the legacy! We must therefore have all the worry of a lawsuit.

GOUL-SEBAH. Is it not a fact, madame, that your sister-in-law has no right to the legacy left by your brother?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. She certainly has none. What right could she have? She was not his lawful wife, that she should inherit his fortune. She has not even a child who could be co-heir to it! I do not really know why she has protested.

GOUL-SEBAH. Do not trouble your head about it, madame. Please God, nothing will be done against you. But make one promise to your servant; I will pray God to bring out your business well, and to grant that you may soon reach the goal of your desires.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. What is your desire? What promise do you wish me to make to you?

GOUL-SEBAH. Promise me, when this affair is settled, by the favor of God, and you have come into possession of your fortune, promise me to defray the expenses of my wedding and to give me a husband. What could I desire beside that?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Very well. Do you pray to God that our lawsuit may be quickly ended, and I will give a husband to you also. But start at once, and go to the house of Aziz-Bey, and tell him to come to me; I wish to see what he says about all this. The President of the Tribunal has induced me to ask an advocate to plead my cause. But I have no one in this country excepting Aziz-Bey, and a paternal aunt—and she is, of course, a woman, and what can a woman do for me?

GOUL-SEBAH [*she goes out and at once returns*]. Madame, here comes Aziz-Bey himself at the very nick of time. [*Sekiné-Khanoun closes the window and Aziz-Bey enters the room.*]

Scene II

AZIZ-BEY [*abruptly*]. See what a mess you have led me into, Sekiné.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN [*with surprise*]. I! What mess have I led you into? But, tell me, what has happened that you seem so vexed and gloomy?

AZIZ-BEY. Listen to me, Sekiné. You know that two years ago, just as I left school, I fell sick with love for you, so that I had no longer strength to leave the house, although your brother ill-treated me, and made every effort to separate us two. During this whole time, I have proved constant, and have put up with his harshness. My love, so far from being cooled, has grown from day to day, and in the hope that sooner or later we should be united, I have patiently endured all sorts of outrage and persecutions. Meanwhile the moment of our union seemed to be near, and my thoughts became somewhat more cheerful, and I enjoyed a little more peace of mind—and now I learn that I am again to be plunged into misfortune!

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. What do you say? Speak more plainly, that I may understand your meaning. I do not comprehend you.

AZIZ-BEY. How is it you do not comprehend? Are you not aware that yesterday, Aga-Hassam, the merchant, has sent the wife of the head of the Traders' Company, that of the mayor, and that of Bagis, the lawyer, to the house of your aunt, to demand your hand of her? Your aunt has given her word in assent.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. But my aunt talks nonsense! Who pays any attention to her words?

AZIZ-BEY. I can stand this no longer. You must send at once and call for your aunt, and let me with my own ears hear her declare that you shall never be the wife of Aga-Hassam, or else I must decide to kill Aga-Hassam this very day, and may I succeed in doing so! What is this Hassam? A shopkeeper! He wishes to step into my shoes, to pay court to my *fiancée*, and to cross my path, does he! By God, I will cut his heart out with this dagger.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Very good. I will send to my aunt, and

beg of her to come at once. Then I will tell her that I am not, and never will be the wife of Aga-Hassam. When my aunt arrives, you must go into this room, and you will hear what she says with your own ears.—Goul-Sebah!

Scene III

GOUL-SEBAH. What is it, madame?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Goul-Sebah, go and ask my aunt to come here. [*Goul-Sebah goes out.*]

Scene IV

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Well, but come now, whom shall we take for our advocate?

AZIZ-BEY. Advocate? For what purpose?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Alas, he asks me for what purpose! Have they not told you, then, that my sister-in-law disputes the legacy, and wishes to involve me in a law-suit?

AZIZ-BEY. Yes, I have heard it said, but at present my head is whirling round. First let your aunt come, and when she goes away, I will find an advocate. [*At this moment a footstep is heard, Aziz-Bey returns to the other room, and Zobeide, aunt of Sekiné-Khanoun enters the apartment.*]

Scene V

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Good-day, my dear aunt.

ZOBEIDE. Good-day, Sekiné. How are you? Are you quite well?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Ah! how can I be well, when I have allowed you, aunt, to promise me in marriage to Aga-Hassam? I have neither father nor brother, and am altogether dependent on myself for the management of my life.

ZOBEIDE. Are you not ashamed to speak thus? What! not a blush! Has not all been done in your interest? You need a husband; you must take him who is given to you. It is not proper that young girls should speak in this style before their elder relations. It is shameful! Fie upon you, Sekiné!

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Not at all. I have spoken just as I choose ;
I will no longer surrender my liberty, and no one shall
force a husband upon me.

ZOBEIDE. Very good. You do not, then, wish to marry?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. No ; I certainly do not wish to marry.

ZOBEIDE [*smiling*]. There are many girls who say no, like you ;
but later on they come to reason.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. In the name of God, aunt, do not make
fun of me ; it is absurd to wish me to marry Aga-Hassam ;
you may as well give up that idea altogether.

ZOBEIDE. It is not possible for you to recede, my dear niece.
You would make enemies for me of all the leading people
of the country.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. They may go to the devil for all I care.
Aga-Hassam is loathsome to me ; the very sight of him
makes me sick.

ZOBEIDE. Why is that?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. He is a low fellow.

ZOBEIDE. He may be a low fellow to everyone else, but to us he
is of the first water. He is successful in business, is very
rich, and his connections are among the leading people of
the province. Where will you find a better husband?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Even if Aga-Hassam were to load me with
jewels from head to foot I would never be his wife. Go
and tell him to give up all idea of this.

ZOBEIDE. Never. Who, pray, are you, that you presume to go
back on the word which I have given? Aga-Hassam sent
to me the leading ladies of the land. I am no child, and I,
of course, consented to their offer ; I had your interest in
view, and gave my word to them. Do you wish me to
appear in the eyes of the world as an imbecile? I have, I
believe, both name and rank ; I have a position of dignity,
and am an honorable woman.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. And so I am to be made unhappy for my
whole life in order that your reputation and your honor
may suffer no damage! You have laid a strange duty
upon me, aunt. By Heaven, I swear that I will never,
never marry Aga-Hassam, even though the whole world
be brought to ruin. It is I who tell you this, and you must
explain matters to him, and make him abandon this pro-

posál. If you do not, I will send for him myself, and I will meet him face to face and give him such a tongue-lashing as he never had before. I will treat him worse than a dog, and send him away with a flea in his ear.

ZOBEIDE [*covering her face with both her hands*]. Oh! Oh! My God! Oh! how the whole world is become topsy-turvy. The young girls of to-day have neither shame nor reserve. Sekiné, I have never before met a girl of such effrontery as you exhibit. I myself have been young, I have had older relatives about me, but from respect toward them I would never have dared to raise my head in contradiction to them. It is because of this effrontery of yours that plague and cholera cease not to waste this province.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. No, it is owing to the baseness of certain degraded people that plague and cholera are raging here. This miserable wretch has heard of my fortune of 60,000 tomans, and this is the reason why he sent and asked for my hand. If this were not so, why did he not seek to win me by the avenue of love and inclination? If he desired to espouse me for my own sake, why did he keep his mouth shut, and refrain from breathing a word during my brother's lifetime.

ZOBEIDE. He might have had no desire to wed you in your brother's lifetime. But you do well to remind me of the 60,000 tomans. Are you not aware that unless you marry Aga-Hassam he will cause you to forfeit this sum of money?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Why, and in what way will he cause me to forfeit it?

ZOBEIDE. In what way? Why, he will go to your sister-in-law, and make common cause with her. His kinsmen and family will support her claim and confirm her declaration, and you will be compelled to abandon your rights. The reason is palpable; it lies in the greed and devilish trickery of those people whose minds are set on nothing else but the absorption of other people's fortunes, great and small. And what do you know about such matters as these? Who will listen to your arguments or pleas?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Very good. Let us admit that my rights are to be invaded and my pleas disregarded. Still, I do not

understand how a mistress, a domestic servant, can pretend to the legacy that belongs to me. We shall soon be told that there is neither right nor justice in this country, and that everyone can do just what he likes, and as he understands it to be best for himself!

ZOBEIDE. Ah, my child, is there any safeguard from the trickery of mankind? What rights had the wife of Hadji-Rehim in the fortune of her husband? Nevertheless 12,000 tomans in cash and a bathing establishment were stolen from Aga-Riza, the son of Hadji-Rehim, to make a gift for this vile woman. By all sorts of rascalities the advocate of this woman forged a deed of gift, and pretended that Hadji-Rehim in his lifetime transferred to his wife 12,000 tomans, in specie, and a bathing establishment. Five or six persons were produced as witnesses, and in spite of his cries and lamentations, the money and the *hammam* were stolen from poor Aga-Riza, who utterly failed to obtain justice? You are quite unaware of the diabolical wiles of law officers in this country; no one can escape from the manœuvres of these people, no one can see through these manœuvres and false statements. Do you think that I have promised your hand to Aga-Hassam to please myself? Not at all. I have seen that there was no course to take, and I said to myself that we must accept the situation with a good grace; and that this was the best thing to be done.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Even though all my fortune should be swallowed up to the last penny, I will never be the wife of Aga-Hassam. Go, then, and explain this to him; tell him that your niece refused her consent.

ZOBEIDE. Do not speak in this way, Sekiné. I see your plan. You wish to become the wife of Aziz-Bey, and to mingle the blood of our race with heretics; to bring in those people, and to set them at the head of our family; to do despite to the spirits of our ancestors, and to cover yourself with disgrace. Never, up to this day, has such a thing been seen in our family. How can the daughter of an honest, God-fearing merchant become the wife of an unbeliever? How is it possible?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. How do you know that I desire to espouse

Aziz-Bey? I wish to espouse neither him nor anyone else. I wish to remain in my own house. Be quick, then, and give my message to Aga-Hassam.

ZOBEIDE. You are a young girl, you have not reached years of discretion, and cannot see your own interests. I have not the slightest intention of going to find Aga-Hassam, and telling him that my niece is unwilling to marry him. I have promised you to him, and he left after receiving my word on it; you may spare yourself further talk on this matter. [*Zobeide rises and goes out.*]

Scene VI

AZIZ-BEY. You see now what real trouble I am in. I shall go off at once.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Where will you go?

AZIZ-BEY. To this villain, Aga-Hassam, to punish him as he deserves. I can no longer restrain myself.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. What is the matter with you? Do not go; remain here. You will otherwise commit some blunder. I intend sending someone from me to this wretch, to tell him to come here, and I will compel him myself to abandon these designs of his.—Goul-Sebah! [*Enter Goul-Sebah.*]

Scene VII

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Goul-Sebah, go to the home of Aga-Hassam, the merchant, take him aside, and tell him that a woman asks for him on a most important errand; but do not mention my name. [*Exit Goul-Sebah. Then Sekiné-Khanoun turns toward Aziz-Bey.*]

Scene VIII

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. By heavens, Aziz-Bey, you are a child whose lips are still wet with your nurse's milk! Go and look at yourself in the glass and see how red your eyes are from rage. How is it you have so little force of character? This base fellow cannot take me by force.

AZIZ-BEY. You are right; but what can I do when my heart is overflowing. [*Footsteps heard without. Aziz-Bey re-*

turns to the other chamber. Sekiné-Khanoun veils her face and seats herself. Enter Goul-Sebah with Aga-Hassam.]

Scene IX

AGA-HASSAM. Good-day, madame.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN [*pleasantly*]. Good-day, sir. Do you know who I am, brother Hassam?

AGA-HASSAM. No, madame, I do not.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Really! Well, Aga-Hassam, I must inform you that I am Sekiné, the sister of Hadji-Ghafour.

AGA-HASSAM [*in astonishment*]. Indeed! I have heard of you. Can I do any thing for you? I am your humble servant and your slave, your domestic, your lackey.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. No, Aga-Hassam, let me beg you to be neither my slave nor my servant; be my brother, both in this world and in the next, and give up all idea of marrying me. It is for the purpose of making this simple request that I have called you here; this is all I have to say to you.

AGA-HASSAM [*in confusion*]. But, madame, why do you not permit me to be your slave? What fault have I committed?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. You have committed no fault, and it is best that I should speak plainly to you. I am informed that you sent to my aunt to ask for my hand; but it is quite useless for her to give her consent to your demand. I may as well tell you that I am not the person to suit you in this matter; abandon, therefore, your purpose. From henceforth do not name me in connection with this subject again.

AGA-HASSAM. And pray, madame, why is this? Give me the reason. Let me understand why I am not worthy to offer you my services.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. The reason I need not explain. All I have to ask of you is to leave me alone.

AGA-HASSAM. But really, madame, I must know what fault I have committed which makes you repulse me.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. You have not committed a single fault, my brother. But I am to-day mistress of my own actions, and I do not desire to become your wife. I do not love you; nothing can force the heart to love.

AGA-HASSAM. It is very wrong of you to speak in this strain, madame. Do not repeat such words.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. I understand what you mean. Well, do your worst. Spare me, or spare me not, it matters not to me, vile wretch!

AGA-HASSAM. Ah! you will repent of this later on. But think again for a while, and consider whether you have nothing more to say to me.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. I have considered the whole question, and I have but one more observation to make. Leave me! and do whatever you will. There is no one more despicable than you are.

AGA-HASSAM [*enraged*]. Are you mad? I intend to lead you such a dance that everyone will talk about it; even to the day of your death you will remember it. [*He rises.*]

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Begone! Begone! He who fears you is lower than you are. Do your worst against me. Begone! —What does he say? Does he fancy that anyone is afraid of him? [*Aga-Hassam withdraws, and Aziz-Bey comes back into the room.*]

Scene X

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Come in and let me think over matters. One stone frightens away a hundred crows.

AZIZ-BEY. I am going to tell the whole affair to Chah-Zade, the King's son, and ask him to settle it offhand.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. The Prince Royal cannot stop the lawsuit. In any case we must have an advocate.

AZIZ-BEY. The Prince Royal cannot stop the lawsuit; but he can defeat the artifices of a rascal like Aga-Hassam. I must inform him of the affair. My father has long been devoted to his service, and he is well disposed toward me; he has promised to give me employment and to establish me in an office, and to give me my father's fortune.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. That is all very good, but let us first secure the services of an advocate; afterward you can go and tell the whole story to the Prince Royal, and he will see what is best to be done.

AZIZ-BEY. Very good. Whom would you like to have for an advocate? [*At this moment Goul-Sebah enters the room.*]

Scene XI

GOUL-SEBAH. Madame, a certain individual who professes to have important business to discuss with you is waiting at the door. He asks if there is anyone who can serve as his representative with you.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Certainly, Aziz-Bey is here. Tell the man to come in; we wish to know what he wants. [*Goul-Sebah goes out.*]

Scene XII

AZIZ-BEY. Do you think it wise that the newcomer should see me with you?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Do people know who you are? Probably you will be taken for one of my family. [*Aga-Kerim enters the room. Sekiné-Khanoun veils herself.*]

Scene XIII

AGA-KERIM. Good-day to you both.

AZIZ-BEY. Good-day, sir. Be seated, if you please; you are welcome.

AGA-KERIM [*seating himself and turning to Aziz-Bey*]. My young master, kindly tell me your name.

AZIZ-BEY. My name is Aziz-Bey.

AGA-KERIM. It is a fortunate name. But Aziz-Bey, may I speak to you on a certain matter in the presence of Sekiné-Khanoun?

AZIZ-BEY. You may address your remarks directly to Sekiné-Khanoun. Do not think that she is frivolous like other young ladies; she delights in conversation, and will not be at all bashful in answering your questions.

AGA-KERIM. She is right. But let me first of all inform you. Aziz-Bey, that I am Aga-Kerim, the chief of the courtiers, and that I was a close friend of the late Hadji-Ghafour. I happened to drop in on business a moment ago, at the house of Aga-Merdan, the son of the confectioner. By chance Aga-Hassam, the merchant, was also there. He greeted me, sat down, and spoke as follows: "I am told, Aga-Merdan, that you are the advocate of Zeineb, the

widow of Hadji-Ghafour. I take your side in this lawsuit, and I have something to say to you in confidence." I saw that they wanted to have a private talk, so I withdrew. I learned, however, that they were plotting against Sekiné-Khanoun, and I therefore came to warn her, merely from a feeling of gratitude toward Hadji-Ghafour.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. I am delighted to find, Aga-Kerim, that you have not forgotten the claims of friendship, and that in the present emergency you have remembered the sister of an old friend.

AGA-KERIM. Ah yes, madame, friendship is a valuable thing in these days. I have seen how things stood, for this Aga-Merdan is a rogue and a scheming rascal whose equal is to be found neither in earth nor in heaven. I therefore decided to come, and in a friendly spirit to warn you beforehand of their intrigues, for if they are permitted to carry them out, there will be no cure for the consequences.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. But, Aga-Kerim, what can Aga-Merdan do against me?

AGA-KERIM. What can he do? I am told that he is the advocate of your sister-in-law, and intends to sue you at law in her name. He is very clever and resourceful in affairs of this sort; you would be no match for him. It is very difficult to get ahead of him.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. What can he do in this lawsuit? My brother has no child to inherit his fortune. On the other hand, a woman who has been no more than temporary wife can make no claim to the heritage. However clever Aga-Merdan, or anyone else, may be, what injury can they do me in a case which is so clear?

AGA-KERIM. You have had very little experience in affairs of this sort. Aga-Merdan will find means to accomplish his ends. You must not let him take you at a disadvantage in the struggle.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. But how can we help being taken at a disadvantage?

AGA-KERIM. Well, tell me in the first place who your advocate is, so that I may see him, and make him acquainted with some of the tricks of Aga-Merdan. If he is intelligent he won't let himself be caught napping.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. We do not know whom to take for our advocate.

AGA-KERIM. How is that? You don't know whom to take, and have not appointed anyone to defend you in this case?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. No, we do not know whom to choose; we are just on the point of considering the question.

AZIZ-BEY. Could not you, Aga-Kerim, name someone to whom we could intrust our case?

AGA-KERIM. No, I know no one who would be able to hold his own against Aga-Merdan. I thought you had your advocate already on hand.

AZIZ-BEY. No, we have not appointed anyone. We were merely on the lookout for a man of great ability whom we could intrust with the defence of our interests. But think again; cudgel your brains. Have you no idea of anyone?

AGA-KERIM. No, I can think of no man who is of great ability. There are plenty of advocates, but there is none of them who could cope with Aga-Merdan. But stay; there is someone, if he would consent to be your advocate, for he has retired for some time from business of the kind. He alone would be able to hold his own with Aga-Merdan.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Who is he?

AGA-KERIM. He is Aga-Selman, the son of the sieve-maker. Intrust your case with him if he will undertake it.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Who would be able to see him and speak to him about it?

AGA-KERIM. It is not necessary to delegate anyone to see him. Send for him, and speak to him yourself here. Perhaps your arguments may persuade him to accept the case; the discourse of a woman has so much influence.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Aga-Kerim, could you not see him yourself, and send him to us?

AGA-KERIM. No, madame. I have fallen out with him about a trifling matter. Send somebody else to fetch him.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. But how can you in this case give him certain information which you wish him to have?

AGA-KERIM. If you had another advocate, I should deem it necessary to instruct him in these matters; but in the case

of Aga-Selman it is superfluous. He is clever enough to make slippers for the devil himself. Although I have quarrelled with him, I cannot deny his merit. God grant that your lawsuit may succeed.

AZIZ-BEY. I shall go and fetch him myself. [*Aziz-Bey and Aga-Kerim rise from their seats and prepare to go out.*]

AGA-KERIM. God preserve you, madame.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Thanks for your kind visit.

AGA-KERIM. I shall never forget your goodness. [*Aga-Kerim goes out with Aziz-Bey.*]

Scene XIV

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Goul-Sebah! bring in a lounge, and lay a cushion on it. [*Scarcely has Goul-Sebah brought in the lounge and placed a cushion on it, when a sound of footsteps is heard in the vestibule. Aziz-Bey enters the room with Aga-Selman. Sekiné-Khanoun takes a seat at the back of the stage; Goul-Sebah stands by her side.*]

Scene XV

AGA-SELMAN. Good-day, madame!

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Good-day, sir. You are welcome, Aga-Selman, and your visit gratifies me exceedingly. Have the goodness to take a seat. [*She points with her finger to the lounge. Aga-Selman seats himself at the foot of the lounge and Aziz-Bey takes a place by his side.*]

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN [*in a melancholy voice*]. Aga-Selman, I am the sister of Hadji-Ghafour. I hope that you will treat me as your daughter, and will not refuse me your support in this day of misfortune.

AGA-SELMAN. Speak, madame, tell me what is your desire?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. You know, Aga-Selman, that seven or eight months ago everyone forsook the city and fled in every direction because of the cholera. Hadji-Ghafour was a man full of confidence in God; he declared he would not leave, but as a precaution he took to the President of the Tribunal and placed on deposit with him, in exchange for vouchers, and in the presence of witnesses, a sum of 60,000 tomans, laid up in strong-boxes. "If I should hap-

pen to die," he said, "you must give this money to my legal heir." The President of the Tribunal took charge of the money, and then, like everybody else, he quitted the city. All our neighbors also left. No one was at home but my brother and I, with a woman whom he had espoused in temporary marriage. It happened that my brother fell sick. No one was left in the town but some soldiers whom the government had left to guard the houses of the inhabitants, and to carry the dead to the cemetery. On that day four soldiers came to our house, and my brother said to them: "I am dying, and I have no other heir in the world but my sister here. After my death take me away to the cemetery." Then my brother departed to the other world. Meanwhile my sister-in-law, who is no more than a mistress to whom no legacy can fall, pretends to be the heiress of my brother, and institutes a suit against me. Her advocate is Aga-Merdan, the son of the confectioner, and I hope that you will be willing to undertake the task of defending me.

AGA-SELMAN. Madame, I have retired from practice, and do not intend henceforth to be anyone's advocate.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. This business will not take long, Aga-Selman; it will soon be finished; it is matter for a single session. If witnesses are required to testify to the words of my brother, there are the soldiers—you can summon them as witnesses. I hope that you will undertake my case out of mere good-will toward me.

AGA-SELMAN. Do you know the names and addresses of these soldiers?

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Yes. Aziz-Bey will write the information on a sheet of paper and will hand it to you.

AGA-SELMAN. Since you depend upon me, I accept the case; but on condition that it is not to turn out a long one, for if it is likely to last for any period, it will not be possible for me to devote myself to it.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. It is matter for a single day, and in recompense for your trouble I will give you a fee of 500 tomans.

AGA-SELMAN. That is scarcely necessary, madame. I engage in this business purely out of regard for you, and without motives of self-interest.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. I know it, Aga-Selman, but I offer you this sum as pocket-money for your children.

AGA-SELMAN. Allow me now to retire, madame; I must go and find the soldiers and ask them to come and testify at the trial. As for you, make out a brief and send it to me.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Very good, I will prepare and send it to you. But I would remind you, Aga-Selman, that Aga-Merdan is said to be very crafty; leave nothing undone to defeat his tricks.

AGA-SELMAN. Keep your mind easy, madame, his tricks will avail nothing against me. Aziz-Bey, make a note of the names and addresses of these soldiers and send the particulars to me.

AZIZ-BEY. Yes, yes; they will be at your house in less than an hour. [*Aga-Selman rises and goes out. Aziz-Bey and Sekiné-Khanoun remain alone.*]

Scene XVI

AZIZ-BEY. As for me, I am going to tell the whole story to the Prince Royal.

SEKINÉ-KHANOUN. Sit down. First of all write the names and addresses of the soldiers, and send them to Aga-Selman; then you can leave me. [*Aziz-Bey sits down to write.*]

ACT SECOND

Scene I

The action passes in the house of Aga-Merdan, son of the confectioner.

AGA-MERDAN [*discovered seated alone*]. I do not know what can have happened that Aga-Kerim is so late in coming. He must have been planning that Aga-Selman may be Sekiné-Khanoun's advocate, and this is probably what has detained him. If this affair succeeds, as I predict, beside the fact that I shall gain no small sum of money, my reputation will be spread through the whole city and will rise sky high. That is to say, that this lawsuit is an inexhaus-

tible mine of wealth to the man who can direct it and make it turn out aright. Thank God, I am not troubled about that. [*While he speaks the door opens, and Aga-Kerim enters the room.*]

Scene II

AGA-KERIM [*gayly*]. Good-day. Congratulate me; I have arranged everything.

AGA-MERDAN [*with a smile*]. Really? Is it credible?

AGA-KERIM. Yes, on your soul it is. I have praised you so highly to the widow of Hadji-Ghafour that if you had been there you would not have believed your ears. "To-day," I said to her, "there is no one of more consideration with the President of the Tribunal than Aga-Merdan. He is never deceived, and all he says comes to pass. At the palace among the advocates he is the only one recognized. This is so true of his reputation that on certain occasions he has public and private audiences with the Prince Royal. For knowledge of affairs he is the Plato of the century. Follow his advice implicitly, and do not be anxious about anything. It is only under his direction that you will be able to enter into possession of Hadji-Ghafour's fortune; for, excepting through him, you have no right to the legacy!" The woman was well satisfied, even delighted, as was her brother, Aga-Abbas. Meanwhile they are coming to see you, in order that you may dictate to them the line they are to take.

AGA-MERDAN. Very good, very good. But, tell me, have you been equally successful in securing for Aga-Selman the defence of the other party?

AGA-KERIM. Yes. Aga-Selman is at this very moment with Sekiné-Khanoun, and as soon as he is at liberty he will come here.

AGA-MERDAN. It is wonderful, Aga-Kerim. By God, you work miracles with your tongue. But, tell me, is the widow of Hadji-Ghafour pretty?

AGA-KERIM. Why do you ask?

AGA-MERDAN. Why, because I want her to fall in love with me, and marry me. Why should she not be my wife?

AGA-KERIM. How can I tell you whether she will love you or not? Your age is a little advanced and the woman is young.

AGA-MERDAN. No, Aga-Kerim, as sure as death, I am not so advanced in age. I am exactly fifty-one.

AGA-KERIM. I shouldn't have believed it; I thought you were seventy.

AGA-MERDAN. Seventy? Not on your life. You know I was born the year of the great earthquake at Tebriz.

AGA-KERIM. You are married already.

AGA-MERDAN. I do not wish to marry her because I am in want of a wife. But this is how I consider the matter: If we succeed in carrying off all this fortune from Hadji-Ghafour's sister, and transferring it to this woman, why should it go to another husband? Let me marry the woman, and the fortune becomes mine at the same time. This is also in your interest; what advantage will you otherwise gain from it?

AGA-KERIM. Yes, but in that case what matters whether she be pretty or plain? It would be much better that she should be a monster, if in that way she would become enamored of you, and consent to marry you. But she is not plain, and I do not believe she would find you to her taste.

AGA-MERDAN. Do you mean that I am not likely to please her, and to be accepted by her?

AGA-KERIM. Come now, do not you know this yourself? Your face is certainly not particularly captivating.

AGA-MERDAN. Of course I cannot truly say what effect I produce on you. Let me look at myself a little in the glass. [*He looks at himself in a wardrobe mirror.*] By God, Aga-Kerim, what do you find to criticise in my appearance? Do you mean that my teeth are gone? They fell out through an inflammation, and not from old age. It is true that my jaws are slightly wrinkled, but this is not seen, the beard hides it.

AGA-KERIM. Good for you. That is sufficient. Now sit down; she will soon be here.

AGA-MERDAN. Wait a while; let me put on my cashmere robe, button my surtout, and comb my beard. Then I will come and sit down. [*He begins to dress himself.*]

AGA-KERIM. Is all this necessary? Do sit down.

AGA-MERDAN. Certainly it is necessary. Our women always veil themselves from the eyes of men, but they are extremely fond of gazing at us. If the widow of Hadji-Ghafour sees me in full dress she will have more consideration for me, and my words will have more influence on her mind. It is even possible that I may prove captivating to her. [*He dresses, combs his beard, and seats himself. At this moment the door opens, and the widow of Hadji-Ghafour enters with her brother, Aga-Abbas.*]

Scene III

AGA-ABBAS. Good-day, gentlemen.

AGA-MERDAN. Good-day to you both. You are very welcome, and your visit gives me great pleasure. Be good enough to sit down. [*The widow of Hadji-Ghafour, wearing a veil, sits down, and so does her brother.*] I am going to address my remarks to you, Aga-Abbas; Madame Zeineb will hear, and will answer when necessary. Six months ago Hadji-Ghafour died. It is necessary that the root of the matter be made clear, and without mystery. Everyone knows that Zeineb-Khanoun was not the legal wife of Hadji-Ghafour; she cannot, therefore, pretend to receive whatever of fortune there is by right of inheritance. But having learned this circumstance, I sent Aga-Kerim to you to inform you that if you wish to take my advice, and govern yourselves according to the measures I shall take, I can find a way to bring all this fortune into the hands of Zeineb-Khanoun. As you know, the sister of Hadji-Ghafour is an orphan, she has neither relatives nor family to abet her. The young lady has indeed a lover, but this young man is no match for me. You have accepted my proposals, and have forbidden the President of the Tribunal to deliver to the sister of Hadji-Ghafour the sum which the latter had deposited into the judge's hands until you have shown cause why. The President of the Tribunal has held the money, and has next notified you and the sister of Hadji-Ghafour to employ counsel, and to bring your case before the Tribunal, in order to state the object

of your petition. I am the man whom you have empowered to act for you. But it is necessary that madame should listen attentively to all that I am going to say, and that she comport herself in accordance with my advice; if she wishes the affair to turn out in accordance with our desires.

AGA-ABBAS. Certainly. Nothing can be done without this. Come, then, detail to us the conditions which you would impose upon Zeineb.

AGA-MERDAN. First of all, Zeineb-Khanoun must deposit with me a fund of 500 tomans to meet certain unavoidable expenses; the remainder of the dues will be paid afterward. Zeineb-Khanoun has herself declared to Aga-Kerim that at the death of Hadji-Ghafour there were a thousand tomans left in the strong-box, and that she carried them off, without the knowledge of the dead man's sister.

ZEINEB-KHANOUN. I make no objection to your demands on this point; tell me your other condition.

AGA-MERDAN. It will be also necessary, madame, that you be satisfied with one-half of the legacy; that is to say, that of the 60,000 tomans half goes to you and the other half, some 30,000 tomans, is to be divided between Aga-Kerim and me, as comrades, friends, and associates.

ZEINEB-KHANOUN. Good gracious, Aga-Merdan, but this is exorbitant!

AGA-MERDAN. It is by no means excessive, Madame. You have no right to this inheritance; the 30,000 tomans are therefore my free gift to you.

ZEINEB-KHANOUN. What do you mean? I have no rights? For years I have trudged up and down the house of Hadji-Ghafour; all the closet keys were in my hands; I had all I desired, and it was I who controlled the expenses. So long as Hadji-Ghafour lived his sister could not dispose of a single franc of his. What has happened that I am to be thrust on one side, and that this adventuress is to come and carry off all the money; that she is to drink it up, and spend it in order to have a wedding with a young scamp?

AGA-MERDAN. Such reasons as these are not listened to by the Tribunal.

ZEINEB-KHANOUN. What! not listened to? Ought not justice to be considered in a lawsuit? For ten years and more this fortune remained in my hands, and now I am to be stripped of it!

AGA-MERDAN. Yes, indeed, and you ought to be stripped of it. Listen to me. Surrender one-half of this inheritance, for in reality you have no right to a single penny of it. Aga-Abbas is well acquainted with the matter, and he knows what I say is true.

AGA-ABBAS. Yes, we accept the condition. What conditions beside these do you impose?

AGA-MERDAN. My third condition is that Zeineb-Khanoun shall declare in presence of the President of the Tribunal that she has by Hadji-Ghafour a child now seven months old, and still at the breast; this child she shall present before the Tribunal.

ZEINEB-KHANOUN. Oh, oh, Aga-Merdan, this is very, very hard. How can I dare to tell such a lie? That I have a child seven months old!

AGA-MERDAN. It is not hard at all. While Hadji-Ghafour was living you were *enceinte*. A month before his death you brought into the world a little boy—now seven months old. Is there any difficulty in stating that?

ZEINEB-KHANOUN. I look upon you as my father, Aga-Merdan, and I will never contravene your counsels; but this condition is too hard. Will not people say to me, knowing I have never had a child, "Where is your child? Where is your child?"

AGA-MERDAN. Don't distress yourself on that score. The child is all ready. You have brought him into the world. The babe has been in your arms, and in the arms of Hadji-Ghafour. There are even people that will testify to that effect. Don't distress yourself about these matters; simply make your statement, and others will confirm it.

ZEINEB-KHANOUN. In the name of God, Aga-Merdan, impose upon me some condition that I can fulfil; this is really too trying. How can I perpetrate such a falsehood? I'd never dare to talk in that way.

AGA-MERDAN. You are talking nonsense, Zeineb-Khanoun! I know what you mean by all this. Why would you not

dare to say it? Why are you ashamed to do so? Everybody knows that it is the business of women to produce children. What shame is there in it? You have perhaps never been *enceinte*, and you have never borne a child. Let it be so; but he who wants to catch a fish must put his hand into cold water. It is quite necessary that you make this declaration. There is no other way of succeeding.

ZEINEB-KHANOUN. What end do you wish to gain by this, Aga-Merdan?

AGA-MERDAN. I wish by this means to have the fortune of Hadji-Ghafour secured to you, and in order to arrive at this result, there is no other expedient possible but this one. You cannot inherit from your husband in your own name. Your child, on the other hand, is heir at law. When the existence of your child is proved all the fortune reverts to him. I will then have myself without difficulty appointed his guardian; then in five or six months, I will give it out that the child is dead, and in that case the inheritance will be legally transferred to you. You will take half of it and give me the other half. God is the best foster-father.

ZEINEB-KHANOUN. O you for whom I would give my life, can such a lie be uttered?

AGA-MERDAN. If the sister of Hadji-Ghafour had anyone to maintain her cause do you think that she would fail to defeat us? But to-day she has no one to oppose us, and plead her cause for her. If she had married Aga-Hassam, the merchant, the business would have been very difficult for us. But now, Aga-Hassam, himself, and all his influential kinsfolk have become enemies of this young lady; they desire that this fortune should not be hers. The girl is deserted and left with her lover, who is good for nothing.

ZEINEB-KHANOUN. Well, well! and this child of whom you speak, where is he?

AGA-MERDAN. You are going to see him this moment.—Aga-Kerim, go and take the child from the arms of his nurse there in the chamber. Bring him in for madame to see. [*Aga-Kerim goes out to fetch the child.*]

Scene IV

ZEINEB-KHANOUN. Is she a wet-nurse?

AGA-MERDAN. No, it is his own mother who has him at the breast. But she becomes his nurse now. [*Aga-Kerim returns, carrying the child in his arms. Aga-Merdan takes it and gives it to Zeineb-Khanoun.*]

Scene V

AGA-MERDAN. This is your child. You see his eyes and brows are exactly those of Hadji-Ghafour.

ZEINEB-KHANOUN. My God, one might take it for his portrait! But I fear that at the trial my tongue will refuse to tell this lie.

AGA-MERDAN. The cause of your fears, Zeineb-Khanoun, is that you are not persuaded that you yourself are not the mother of this child. You must, before everything else, bear well in mind that this is your child, or else you will lose countenance at the hearing, and will stand before the judge with closed mouth. Have no fear, and give me your word that you will make the declaration as I dictate.

ZEINEB-KHANOUN. Yes, I promise you, if I am able.

AGA-MERDAN. You will be able, please God. It would be fine, in truth, if your sister-in-law should carry off the whole inheritance, and squander it with a scamp, trimming his mustache with it.

ZEINEB-KHANOUN. Yes, by God, you are right. But one thing troubles me. Will not the advocate of Sekiné-Khanoun discover my falsehood?

AGA-MERDAN. Ha! ha! ha! See how frightened she is of him! Fear nothing. He won't say a single word to expose you. Go now and get your application to the judge drawn up. All must be ready by to-morrow. As for me, I have another matter to attend to. Another person is looking for me; I have a thousand suits in hand. Take Aga-Kerim with you, and give him the 500 tomans; he will bring them to me.

AGA-ABBAS. The money is ready. We have brought it. Aga-Kerim had told us to do so beforehand.

AGA-MERDAN. Very good; leave it with me and retire. [*Aga-Abbas puts down the sum of money in a purse before Aga-Kerim. At the moment when Zeineb and Aga-Abbas rise to depart Nasser, the valet of the Prince Royal, approaches Aga-Merdan.*]

Scene VI

NASSER. Good-day, gentlemen. Aga-Merdan, the Prince Royal begs that you will come to his house this evening and spend an hour with him. He requires your services in an important affair.

AGA-MERDAN. Tell your master in reply that I am at his service. [*The lackey retires. Soon afterward, Eced, the servant of the President of the Tribunal, arrives.*]

Scene VII

ECED. Good-day, gentlemen. Aga-Merdan, my master invites you to dine with him this evening at the home of Hadji-Semi. He has pressing business on which he wishes to consult you.

AGA-MERDAN. You may tell your master that I will be there, and consent merely to please him. [*Aga-Abbas and his sister retire.*]

Scene VIII

AGA-KERIM. I do not understand where this messenger of the Prince Royal and this servant of the judge came from.

AGA-MERDAN. I felt that the woman might be troubled with regard to the conditions which I imposed upon her. This is the reason why I bribed these individuals to deliver such messages in her presence. I did so in order that she might imagine me to be the friend of the Prince Royal and the boon companion of the President of the Tribunal, in order that she might recover her spirits. I was afraid that otherwise she would not dare to make her allegations at the hearing of the case, and so we should be non-suited.

AGA-KERIM. By God, your idea was a happy one, but at the hearing of the case we must keep our eye on her. If pos-

sible we must manage that she gives her evidence after I have brought on the witnesses. You will promise her as her share 500 tomans; fifty in cash, and the balance later. The witnesses shall each have thirty tomans; fifteen in cash, and fifteen afterward. We will give up this sum after winning the lawsuit, in order that the inspector may not poke his nose into our business; but you know that the affair cannot be made to succeed without his aid, he is so crafty. You know he has already on one occasion detected our game. We cannot cheat him.

AGA-KERIM. Very good. I will go and see about it. [*He rises from his seat to retire.*]

AGA-MERDAN. By the by, just stop one moment. I have an idea which I wish to communicate, and do not forget the hint. When you see the widow of Hadji-Ghafour, give her to understand, in one way or another, that she must not call me "father." As sure as death you must attend to this. I don't like the woman to address me by such a name as father, as if they thought it pleased me. What need can there be to call me by this title?

AGA-KERIM. Well! Well! Do not swear any more. I know what you are driving at. Let your mind be easy. I will tell her not to call you her father again, but to call you her lord. [*Aga-Kerim leaves, and on his departure, Aga-Selman enters.*]

Scene IX

AGA-SELMAN. Good-day, Aga-Merdan.

AGA-MERDAN. Ah, good-day! Come now, how are things getting along?

AGA-SELMAN. I am intrusted with the defence; it is all arranged. But, tell me, what do you think is now to be done?

AGA-MERDAN. I think we would do well to prepare the witnesses, and to take them to the court-room. What honorarium have you been promised?

AGA-SELMAN. They have promised me only 500 tomans; their witnesses, they say, are all ready, the course of the trial plain, and there is nothing either obscure or mysterious in it. I have expressed my satisfaction.

AGA-MERDAN. You have done well; but you know that there is not much profit in defending a good cause. The widow of Hadji-Ghafour sacrifices 30,000 tomans, these 30,000 tomans will be for us two and for Aga-Kerim. Have you ascertained the names of the witnesses? Have you learned their addresses?

AGA-SELMAN. Yes, I have learned and noted all these things. These witnesses are four soldiers: Bedel, Quhreman, Ghaffer, and Nezer—all of Nerdji Street.

AGA-MERDAN. I must send and fetch them, and impress upon them to testify exactly opposite to what they saw. But, first of all, you must go and find them, and beg them, on your part, to bear faithful testimony. As soldiers are willing but poor, much the same as wretched beggars, these men will ask you what present you intend to make them after the trial. "My children," you must answer them, "in an affair like this, it is not good to ask for a fee. You ought to give in your testimony solely for the sake of pleasing God, and he will fully reward you on the day of the resurrection."

AGA-SELMAN. Very good.

AGA-MERDAN. You cannot guess even approximately what will be the testimony of these soldiers?

AGA-SELMAN. Oh, yes, I know that. They will declare that two hours before the death of Hadji-Ghafour they betook themselves to his home, and that he said to them: "I am dying; and have no one in the world surviving me but a sister. Bury me as soon as I am dead."

AGA-MERDAN. Very good; but they will have to change that, and say that Hadji-Ghafour had a little son one month old. Exert yourself now, and go after these soldiers. [*Aga-Selman rises and leaves.*]

Scene X

AGA-MERDAN [*alone*]. Thanks be to God, events are turning out excellently. This is the time when Aga-Kerim is to bring his witnesses. [*At this moment the door opens, and Aga-Kerim enters the room with the Inspector of the Market and four other individuals.*]

Scene XI

THE INSPECTOR. Good-day, Aga-Merdan.

AGA-MERDAN [*to Aga-Kerim, without turning or recognizing the Inspector*]. Good-day, you have found the Inspector?

THE INSPECTOR. No need to find him, for he was never lost. That was an odd question of yours, Aga-Merdan. I see that you do not yet recognize me.

AGA-MERDAN [*first of all leading aside Aga-Kerim*]. Go and fetch Aga-Selman, and make him point out to you the soldiers he spoke of, then bring them to me. [*Turns toward the Inspector.*] My lord, present these gentlemen to me and inform me what sort of men they are.

THE INSPECTOR. Here is Hepou, a professional gambler, who arrived here from Ardebil yesterday; the next is the famous Cheida, of Quzvin, who keeps a bank during the day, and dissipates during the night; then follows Qourban-Ali, of Hamaden, who is Jack-of-all-trades during the night, a hosier in the bazaar by daylight, and lodges with me at night.

AGA-MERDAN. God be praised, they are all honest people, of good standing. But the profession of Hepou is slightly open to suspicion. There will be some distrust roused by his presence.

THE INSPECTOR. Do not be alarmed. Hepou is an old fox who will fool anyone. Do you wish him to appear as a distinguished merchant he will present himself before you, and you yourself would not recognize him. You are doubtless unaware of the fact that he is of a race whose skill has been tested. He is the son of Heides-Qouli, whose foot was cut off. One day, Heides-Qouli was seen in the city of Eher. He traversed on foot two posts during the night, and reached Tebriz, stole from the house of the defunct governor a casket of pearls belonging to the latter, and returned to Eher the same night; at dawn, he was found asleep in the corridor of the caravansary. Everyone was astounded at this feat. It was only on account of the credit he got for it that he was not put to death immediately on detection. They merely cut off his foot and let him go.

AGA-MERDAN. This, then, is the son of Heides of the docked foot? Very good; but we will change his name. All these men are well acquainted with legal procedure, are they not?

THE INSPECTOR. Let your mind be easy on that point; they are all educated; by my life, they could make slippers for the devil. There is none like them; every day they meet together and offer the Lord's Prayer in the mosque.

AGA-MERDAN. Very good. Do they know what sort of testimony they are expected to give?

THE INSPECTOR. No, you will have to teach them that yourself.

AGA-MERDAN. Good. They must depose as follows: One evening at sunset a week before the death of Hadji-Ghafour, we were going all four of us to pay a visit to the houses of the dead. In passing before the house of Hadji-Ghafour we saw him standing at his gate and holding in his arms a babe in long clothes. We saluted him, and asked him how his health was? "Whose child is that?" we said to him. "It is my own," he answered, "he was born three weeks ago. He is my only son; I have no other child."

THE INSPECTOR [*turning to the witnesses*]. Do you understand, boys?

HEPOU. Yes, we understand.

AGA-MERDAN. Can you repeat the story as I told it?

HANIFE. Undoubtedly so; there are no far-fetched expressions to puzzle us.

AGA-MERDAN. Very good, my friends. May God bless you!

CHEIDA. How in the name of everything, Aga-Merdan, would God bless such a transaction as this?

AGA-MERDAN. Why not? My dear friend, if you were acquainted with the whole affair you would certainly say yourself that God would bless it. The unhappy widow of Hadji-Ghafour has been for ten years mistress of his house and fortune. Would it be just that a sickly wench should carry off all this money, and proceed to enjoy it with a base loafer, a heretic, and for the sole reason that the latter is to have criminal relations with her? Accord-

ing to the words of your doctors, the Sunnites are excluded from the court of heaven.

CHEIDA. Now, by God, but you speak the truth!

THE INSPECTOR. Come now, Aga-Merdan, fix the fee to be paid the boys.

AGA-MERDAN. What? Has not Aga-Kerim done so? I said that I would give thirty tomans to each of those gentlemen. You know, yourself, what your share is to be.

THE INSPECTOR. Yes, but you must advance to the lads the half of their fee.

AGA-MERDAN. Most willingly, if you will now retire. Aga-Kerim will bring your fifty tomans for yourself, as well as half of the fee to be paid to each of these young men.

THE INSPECTOR. Very good. God protect you. [*The Inspector retires with his followers, then the door opens again, and four soldiers enter with Aga-Kerim.*]

Scene XII

THE SOLDIERS. Good-day, sir.

AGA-MERDAN. Good-day, my lads. Be good enough to take a seat. You are extremely welcome. Excuse the trouble which I have given you.

ONE OF THE SOLDIERS. Don't mention it, sir; it is ours to be grateful for the honor of entering the house of a man so honorable.

AGA-MERDAN. A well-educated man is well received anywhere. Have you lunched?

THE SOLDIERS. No, we arrived before luncheon time.

AGA-MERDAN. Aga-Kerim, send someone to the bazaar to purchase for the boys four portions of rice of kebab, likewise of ice and citron cup. See there be an extra supply of kebab, for they are very hungry. You'll like a great deal, won't you?

A SOLDIER. Why take all this trouble, my lord? We will repair ourselves to the bazaar, and eat a bit there.

AGA-MERDAN. What trouble is it, my dear friend? It is lunch time, why should you wish to leave my house fasting and famished? Please God, my plan is best.

THE SOLDIER. My lord, what do you desire of us?

AGA-MERDAN. Nothing much, my lad; I only wish to ask you a plain question.

THE SOLDIER. Speak, my lord—two if you like.

AGA-MERDAN. Did you bear to burial Hadji-Ghafour?

THE SOLDIER. Yes, my lord, it was we who buried him. Why do you ask?

AGA-MERDAN. Ah, I congratulate you on your generous conduct. Your company is always a great honor, not only because you are the defenders of Islam, but also because you do good service to all people in their days of distress. While the cholera prevailed there remained scarce a living soul in the town; you alone did not quit it, making in advance the sacrifice of your lives. May the Thrice Holy Majesty of God reward you worthily for this! But did you ever see Hadji-Ghafour when he was alive, my son?

THE SOLDIER. Yes, my lord, we saw him alive.

AGA-MERDAN. In that case, you must also at his side have seen his little son in long clothes, who was then a month old.

THE SOLDIER. No, my lord, we never saw him.

AGA-MERDAN. Perhaps he was at that moment in his mother's arms?

THE SOLDIER. No, my lord. We asked Hadji-Ghafour how many children he had, sons or daughters, big or little, and he answered that only a sister would survive him.

AGA-MERDAN. That is possible; he did not count his son because the latter was only a baby, one month old. But this babe was then in the arms of his mother; other people have seen him there; and I believe that you have also seen him. There is no harm done; it is all right. But in this case what testimony will you give? For, as you know, there is a lawsuit between the heirs as to the rights of succession.

THE SOLDIER. We will testify of what we have been informed. The advocate of Hadji-Ghafour's sister has already questioned us on this point, and we have corroborated his account.

AGA-MERDAN. Ah, I understand why you speak thus; it is because the discourse of this wretched renegade has produced an impression on your mind. Therefore you deny

the existence of the child. He has doubtless promised you for this twenty tomans, and has advanced you ten.

THE SOLDIER. No, my lord, he did not promise us a penny, and even when we asked for a little present he told us that a witness ought to be disinterested, and that we ought to expect our recompense from God alone.

AGA-MERDAN. Oh, the accursed rogue! See how mean, grasping, and close he is! He won't let anyone profit by a penny excepting himself, and while he tries unjustly to obtain evidence in his favor, in a suit for 60,000 tomans, he grudges to spend twenty or thirty tomans on such kind young fellows as you! By God, there is not in the whole world another wretch like him! May God punish him by utter ruin! His work is unjust, and his conduct ignoble, and he himself a skinflint and a robber.

THE SOLDIER. How is his work unjust, my lord?

AGA-MERDAN. Because he evidently wishes to deny the existence of the little seven months' old child of Hadji-Ghafour. He wishes to cast out this child, and deprive him of his patrimony, in order that the sister of Hadji-Ghafour may get it. But God will not favor this action; he will prove that the child is still alive, and that his existence cannot be overlooked. Can such a thing be denied? I am the defender of this poor little orphan. I have sworn to give thirty tomans to whoever will testify in favor of this child, and as I know and believe that you have seen him I have this sum ready here, in cash. But what good is it after all, since you say that you have no recollection of the child? Yet perhaps if you were to see him now, your mind might recall him.—Aga-Kerim, go into the house, take the child from the arms of its mother, Zeineb-Khanoun, and bring him here. [*Aga-Kerim soon returns with the little boy, whom he has found in the next room.*]

Scene XIII

AGA-MERDAN. Consider well, my lads, how is it possible that you have not seen this little boy? Would it be humane to let another person swallow up the heritage of this little orphan who cannot speak to defend himself, and that the

unhappy creature be abandoned to sigh and mourn in the streets and behind doors. Perhaps in the excitement of all this trouble you have paid no attention to this child. There are times when people seem to lose their heads.—Aga-Kerim, take from the closet the offering of this young child, and bring it here. [*Aga-Kerim immediately takes from the closet four packets wrapped in paper and lays them within Aga-Merdan's reach.*]

AGA-MERDAN. My dear friends, beside the reward which God will most certainly give you, this little orphan has made to each one of you an offering of thirty tomans enclosed in these four sheets of paper. He is not like that cursed Aga-Selman, who would impose upon you a dishonest action, yet from avarice gives you nothing as a recompense.

A SOLDIER [*suddenly turning to his comrades*]. Tell me, Quhreman, am I mistaken, for it seems to me that I do recall hearing the voice of a little child, while we were at the house of Hadji-Ghafour.

QUHREMAN. Yes, I remember it; there was a woman seated in the corner of the house and she held in her arms a little child in long clothes.

GHAFFER. Why, of course! I remember that Hadji-Ghafour said to us: "This is my wife, and this little child is my son; his mother brought him into the world a month ago."

NEZER. Well, now, to think how we have forgotten this incident! It is true, there are days when people lose their wits. Yes, indeed; did not Hadji-Ghafour ask us to watch over his house, his wife, and his little child, until the inhabitants returned, for fear that the villains of the town should do them some harm?

ALL THE SOLDIERS [*in chorus*]. Yes, he commended to our care his wife and his child.

AGA-MERDAN. May God bless you, my lads! I knew well that you would recall it to mind. Accept, then, the offering of this orphan, and spend it as you choose. After the trial is over, please God, ten tomans more will come to each one of you. A good and sincere action is never lost. My lads, bear witness before the Tribunal exactly as you have done here, and afterward pocket your money.

ONE OF THE SOLDIERS. But, my lord, we have promised to Aga-Selman to testify in his favor. Must we meanwhile inform him that we cannot be his witnesses?

AGA-MERDAN. No; you need not say anything to him. Let him think all the time that you are his witnesses, and that he himself brings you before the Tribunal; when there, deliver your testimony just as you have now done. Aga-Selman has no rights over you, and he can make no claim upon you. If he asks why you speak so, you must answer that it is because you know what the truth is, and are bearing witness to it. Then, you shall pocket your money. The rice has come; go into that room and do me the favor to rest yourselves. But I have one thing to ask of you; no one must know that you have been summoned, and have come here. It is solely for the sake of pleasing God that you will keep this secret, but I promise in return for your secrecy to give to each one of you a Bokhara hat.

THE SOLDIERS. Have no fear on this point, my lord.

AGA-MERDAN. Aga-Kerim, lead these good fellows into that room that they may take their repast; afterward you may dismiss them.

Scene XIV

AGA-MERDAN [*alone*]. So far, so good. Let us start for the court. I am going to get the assessors on my side, and to prepare them to act, so that to-morrow, at the time of deliberation, they may give me the necessary assistance.

ACT THIRD

Scene I

The scene is the Tribunal. The President is seated on a cushion, in the place of honor, having Aga-Rehim on his right, and Aga-Djebbar on his left. By their side are seated the ordinary assessors of the Tribunal, Aga-Bechin and Aga-Settar. On a lower bench is Aga-Merdan, advocate of Hadji-Gha-four's widow, lolling easily upon his seat.

AGA-BECHIN [*addressing the President of the Tribunal*]. Have you detected, my lord, by your intelligence and wisdom, the wiles of that woman who came yesterday to lodge a complaint? She stole three tomans from her husband; she was herself bruised with blows, and had artfully smeared her face with blood, and torn her hair—then she lodged a complaint against her husband.

THE PRESIDENT. Did I not tell you that this woman inspired me with suspicion? We must clear the matter up.

AGA-BECHIN. Yes, my lord, I wish merely to remark how marvellous is your sagacity! None in the whole court doubted the sincerity of this woman, but you at the first glance made us suspicious, and you were quite right.

THE PRESIDENT. In such cases my opinion is often in accordance with the facts.

AGA-BECHIN. One is quite right in the opinion that governments are guided by Divine wisdom. What is this suspicion but a direct inspiration from God?

AGA-REHIM. You seem very much astonished at it, Aga-Bechin, but the most Holy Majesty of God chooses for their merit, and places at the head of their contemporaries, those of his servants whom he has distinguished by special favor. Now, the most Holy Majesty of God has distinguished the President of the Tribunal with quite extraordinary gifts in regard to the knowledge of affairs. Would you like to know what this really is? It is not inspiration; it is, to my mind, a special gift of grace from God.

AGA-DJEBBAR. Yes, you have the choice of the two opinions, either of which may be maintained. Is it not so, Aga-Merdan?

AGA-MERDAN. Undoubtedly. It is certainly so.

AGA-REHIM. Aga-Merdan, how is the little boy of Hadji-Ghafour getting on?

AGA-MERDAN. Very well, thank God. His mother understands it all, and he will come as soon as he is summoned to appear.

AGA-DJEBBAR. He must be fully seven months old, is he not?

AGA-MERDAN. Yes, exactly seven months.

THE PRESIDENT. How is this? Does a son survive Hadji-Ghafour? They told me that he had no child.

AGA-BECHIN. But he had one, my lord; you have been misinformed. He left a little boy who is as beautiful as a crescent moon. Yesterday, as we returned from prayer, we saw him on the doorstep in the arms of his nurse.

AGA-MERDAN. He and Hadji-Ghafour are as much alike as two halves of an apple.

AGA-SETTAR. Do you recall, my lord, the features of Hadji-Ghafour?

THE PRESIDENT. Yes, it is not so long since he died.

AGA-SETTAR. Well, when you see the face of this child you would think at first sight that you beheld that of Hadji-Ghafour.

THE PRESIDENT. I did not know that. It is very good. But tell me, Aga-Merdan, if there is a son of Hadji-Ghafour living, it is a waste of time to open the case. It is evident that the fortune of his father ought to revert to this child, and in such a case the other relatives and collateral heirs have no claim upon it.

AGA-MERDAN [*in a tone of perfect humility*]. My lord, if I recounted to you the reason on which their claims are based, you might doubt of my sincerity. But Aga-Bechin will tell you the whole story.

AGA-BECHIN. Permit me to relate the whole affair, my lord. Hadji-Ghafour left a sister, Sekiné-Khanoun. This woman is infatuated with a young man, whom she loves to madness, and wishes to wed. But the rogue does not so take it; he reminds her that he has nothing and expects

no fortune to come to him. What would he do with her? Meanwhile the damsel works tooth and nail to get into her own hands the inheritance left by Hadji-Ghafour, and so to bring about a marriage with this youngster. Her aunt wishes to marry her to the merchant Aga-Hassam, who is a rich and distinguished man; she refuses. She has chosen an advocate, and set up witnesses in support of her plea that Hadji-Ghafour left no child, and that the 60,000 tomans that constitute his heritage ought to come to her. The woman is half-witted if she imagines that she can carry off the heritage of Hadji-Ghafour by means of such tricks and artifices. This is an absurd idea, and she is giving herself a great deal of useless trouble.

THE PRESIDENT. Very well. The affair is not so complicated or involved as to detain the court long; we shall probably be able to decide and pass sentence in two hours. The two parties must support their claims by testimony and proofs.

AGA-MERDAN. Yes, my lord, the witnesses are all ready.

AGA-SETTAR [*to the President of the Tribunal*]. There were brought here yesterday, my lord, two little abandoned orphans. "We will look out," you said, "for a servant of God, pious and charitable, and confide the children to him." I believe you would do wisely by placing them in the care of Aga-Merdan. He will care for them as if they were his own, for he is always on the search for an opportunity of doing good.

THE PRESIDENT. Very good. Do you consent to this, Aga-Merdan?

AGA-MERDAN. With all my heart, my lord. I will care for them as if they were my own children.

THE PRESIDENT. May the Master of the Universe recompense you as you deserve! [*The door opens during these preliminaries and Aga-Selman enters with Aziz-Bey, in company with four soldiers. Shortly afterward Aga-Abbas and Zeineb-Khanoun, the widow of Hadji-Ghafour, arrive also, accompanied by their four witnesses. Zeineb-Khanoun sits down at one side of the hall, enveloped in a long veil. Aga-Selman, Aziz-Bey, and Aga-Abbas stand up on the other side of the hall.*]

Scene II

THE PRESIDENT. Aga-Selman, it is said that Hadji-Ghafour left a son. Can you prove to the contrary?

AGA-SELMAN. I have witnesses, my lord, who will depose that in the hour of his death, Hadji-Ghafour declared to them that he had no other heir but his sister, Sekiné-Khanoun.

THE PRESIDENT. Let the witnesses make their statement.

AGA-SELMAN [*turning to the soldiers*]. Make your statement.

THE FIRST SOLDIER. My lord, one day before the death of Hadji-Ghafour we went, my comrades and I, to pay him a visit. We asked him whether he had any children, sons or daughters, and he replied: "I have no one in the world but my sister, Sekiné-Khanoun."

THE PRESIDENT. Swear by the name of God that this is just what you heard.

THE FIRST SOLDIER. I swear by the name of God that this is just what I heard. [*Aga-Merdan becomes quite pale, and seems thunderstruck, as does Aga-Selman.*]

THE PRESIDENT [*turning to the other soldiers*]. And you, what did you hear? Speak in turn.

THE SECOND SOLDIER. I call God's name to witness that this is just what I heard.

THE THIRD SOLDIER. I call God's name to witness that I also heard the same.

AGA-MERDAN [*in a voice trembling with anxiety*]. But at that moment did you not perceive a little child in the arms of Hadji-Ghafour's wife?

THE FIRST SOLDIER. It was elsewhere we saw the little child. Would you like us to state where?

AGA-MERDAN. It is well. Keep silence. [*Turning to the President of the Tribunal.*] My lord, I have witnesses who saw an infant one month old in the arms of Hadji-Ghafour, on the very day of which the soldiers speak. "Whose child is this?" they asked Hadji-Ghafour, and he said to them in reply, "It is my son." The witnesses are yonder, before you. [*Beckons witnesses to advance.*] They are all educated, honorable, and pious people.

AGA-SETTAR [*in a tone full of kindness toward Aga-Merdan*].
Verily, Aga-Merdan, the father of this young man was a certain Hadji-Cherif.

AGA-MERDAN. Yes, may God have mercy upon him! He belonged to a saintly family.

AGA-SETTAR. The son of such a father cannot but be an honorable man, and Hadji-Cherif was certainly a most strict man.

THE PRESIDENT [*turning to the witnesses*]. Tell me what you know about it.

HEPOU. Shall I tell all I know?

THE PRESIDENT. Yes, all that you have learned about this affair.

HEPOU. Well, my lord, yesterday Aga-Merdan asked us to come to his house, my companions and me. He gave each of us fifteen tomans to present ourselves here before you, and to declare that at the time of the cholera we saw in Hadji-Ghafour's arms his little child, then one month old. As I am a gambler by profession, I accepted the money and took it; but this money had been given to me for doing evil, and brought me no profit. That night I lost the fifteen tomans to the last penny, for I had fallen in with a sad rogue to whom Leibadj himself could not hold a candle. I know nothing more than that, my lord. I have never seen Hadji-Ghafour, and didn't even know him. [*Aga-Merdan gasps with excitement.*]

THE PRESIDENT [*to the other witnesses*]. And you, what have you to say?

THE OTHER WITNESSES [*in chorus*]. We can only repeat what our comrade has said.

THE PRESIDENT [*to his assessors*]. And you were affirming a moment ago that Aga-Merdan was a virtuous man! Your words prove your dishonesty and deceit. Praised be God in his greatness and sublimity. I do not understand what all this means.

AGA-BECHIN. No, my lord, what proves, on the contrary, that we are honest and loyal men is that we have given faith to the words of Aga-Merdan, and have believed him to be a man of honor.

AGA-REHIM [*sotto voce to Aga-Settar*]. Oh, the liar, may the

devil take him! Do you hear this scoundrel Aga-Bechin, what a good excuse he has ready? The President believes him, and imagines that we are really honest and sincere. [*At this moment the head bailiff of the Prince Royal enters.*]

Scene III

THE HEAD BAILIFF [*to the President of the Tribunal*]. My lord, the Prince Royal asks whether the rights of Hadji-Ghafour's sister have been proved?

THE PRESIDENT. Yes, they have been established. But does the Prince Royal know how the proof has been effected?

THE HEAD BAILIFF. Yes, my lord. The Inspector of the Market saw through the designs of Aga-Merdan and Aga-Selman. He informed the Prince Royal, who took the necessary measures for defeating their machinations. Meanwhile the crime of these two individuals has been proved, and I have received orders to lead them into the presence of the Prince Royal.

THE PRESIDENT. Is Aga-Selman also implicated in this plot?

THE BAILIFF. Yes, he was the secret accomplice of Aga-Merdan. [*The bailiff seizes Aga-Merdan and Aga-Selman and carries them off.*]

Scene IV

THE PRESIDENT. Aziz-Bey, you are to-day the protector of Se-kiné-Khanoun. Go and tell her that in two hours I will take with me the sum of money left by Hadji-Ghafour, and bring it to her, and place it in her hands before the most honorable witnesses.

AZIZ-BEY. It is well, my lord; I will go.

Scene V

AGA-BECHIN [*striking his hands together*]. By the death of the first-born, is it possible to utter fabrications such as those of this Aga-Merdan? O my God, what dishonest people have you created in your world! By his impostures, this wretch wished to set up a son to Hadji-Ghafour! Gentlemen, have you ever seen such audacity? Ah, you may

now treat me as a fool, Aga-Djebbar, and may say that I am exceedingly simple and guileless to believe what the first-comer tells me.

AGA-DJEBBAR [*turning his face and speaking sotto voce*]. Ah, the liar! May the devil carry him off! Oh, yes, you are simple and guileless—that is well known. [*Then in a loud tone:*] Let us adjourn, gentlemen. Let us abridge the fatigue of the President; he has gone through much exertion to-day. Why prolong this talk? [*The President of the Tribunal leads the way out lost in thought. Then the others rise and leave.*]